

TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Improve the Mid-Valley's transportation system across all modes to ensure the efficient movement of goods and people both within the region and to markets throughout the world.

A strong economy relies on a transportation system that efficiently moves goods, people, and services between locations throughout the state, country and world. Businesses rely on a transportation network with multiple modes– including highways, rail, air, and marine shipping– to connect their local communities to the national and global economy. Securing the long-term health of the Mid-Valley's economy will require investing in transportation infrastructure improvements that will improve rail and shipping service that moves many goods to markets and keep congestion from slowing traffic on our highways.

Marion and Polk counties are blessed with a strong highway system that does not suffer from the same level of congestion as larger cities in the Northwest such as Portland and Seattle, both of which face substantial gridlock that slows the delivery of goods and services. While the Salem area's traffic has increased substantially in recent years with the region's explosive population growth, there are few "choke points" in the system that cause traffic to be reduced to a crawl. The two main highways that bisect the region north to south (Interstate 5) and east to west (Highway 22) carry much of the area's economic activity, both within the region and to and from other regions, without excessive congestion. Parts of both of these highways have been modernized and expanded in recent decades. For example, Interstate 5 through north Salem has been widened, and Highway 22 east of Salem has been turned into a divided freeway with significant capacity. However, both major regional arteries also have sections with less capacity. I-5, which is three lanes from Portland to Salem, narrows to just two lanes south of Mission Street. West of Salem Highway 22, which has seen a massive increase in traffic in recent years, is a non-divided highway with serious safety concerns.

Highways are just one part of the transportation infrastructure, however. Regional economies also rely on air service, container shipping to facilitate exports, rail to get products to market, and transit to help workers, particularly low-wage employees, get to their places of employment. The Mid-Valley must continue to work to build a better transportation system across all modes.

Increase the Amount of Federal Highway Funding Oregon Receives. Congress is in the process of reauthorizing the nation's transportation funding legislation, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21). This legislation determines the overall size of the highway funding pie, and the formulas contained in this law determine the size of the slice each state receives. Oregon's congressional delegation will continue to work hard to increase the level of highway funding Oregon receives and provide funding for high-priority projects, including several in Marion and Polk counties.

Responsibility: State, Federal

Improve the Region's Highway System. While the region's highway system is better than many other regions of the country and can help attract businesses, the region must continue to seek investments to improve its transportation infrastructure. A number of highway projects in the Salem area deserve special attention because of their potential to spur long-term economic growth in the region.

- **Widen Interstate 5 Through South Salem.** While Interstate 5, the West Coast's commercial backbone, was widened through north Salem during the 1990s, south of Mission Street the interstate is just two lanes in each direction. This lack of capacity slows down traffic and could prove a substantial drag on the ability to move goods and services to and from the Salem area as the region's population continues to expand. This project is particularly important because the Mill Creek Industrial Park will increase traffic on this stretch of I-5 significantly. With OTIA III funding bridge replacement on this stretch, a rare opportunity exists to widen this section of freeway.
Responsibility: State, Federal
- **Build a Third Willamette Bridge.** Salem's two bridges over the Willamette have reached or exceeded their intended capacity, causing traffic jams that cost businesses time and money. Bridge traffic only continues to grow, and with continued growth forecast for this area, especially in West Salem, a third bridge is needed to provide additional access over the river, improve the movement of people and freight, relieve traffic congestion, and reduce public safety problems, including slow emergency service response times. Without an additional bridge, commerce between Marion and Polk counties will slow. While a new bridge is likely still a decade or more away, the region must continue to plan for it and begin to identify funding sources if the project is ever going to materialize.
Responsibility: Local, State, Federal
- **Modernize Highway 22 West of Salem.** While Highway 22 east of Salem was improved to enhance safety and speed travel between Salem and outlying towns, the stretch of Highway 22 west of Salem has not seen significant improvements. As traffic on Highway 22 has increased dramatically over the last decade, this has become among the most dangerous stretches of highway in the state, and commerce has been impeded. ODOT and Polk County have begun planning several interchanges at major intersections along this route that will enhance safety, eliminate bottlenecks, and facilitate commercial traffic between and within Salem and Polk County cities, as well as the Oregon coast.
Responsibility: Local, State, Federal
- **Build an Interchange at Highway 22 and Cordon Road.** As the State and City of Salem seek to increase the supply of "shovel-ready" industrial land to bring additional jobs to the state, the Mill Creek Industrial Park near the intersection of Highway 22 and Kuebler Boulevard have emerged as an outstanding opportunity for industrial development. In order to realize the full potential of this property, significant improvements must be made, including investments in transportation infrastructure that will allow commercial vehicles easy access to major regional transportation routes. Building an interchange at Kuebler and Highway 22 will facilitate this commercial

development by providing this access at the north end of this site, which currently has limited access.

Responsibility: City, State, Federal

- **Expand the Woodburn I-5 Interchange.** As the population of Woodburn has grown rapidly in recent decades, the sole interchange available along a 14 mile stretch of I-5 through north Marion County has become increasingly clogged with traffic, making it difficult for Woodburn residents and businesses, as well as the thousands of people who visit Woodburn, to get in and out of the city. ODOT has plans to widen this major regional interchange in coming years, but finding sufficient funding to complete the project could be a challenge.

Responsibility: Local, State, Federal

- **Widen Kuebler Boulevard.** Kuebler Boulevard, a major urban parkway in south Salem, already exceeds its vehicle capacity, and traffic is expected to rise significantly when the Mill Creek Industrial Park (MCIP) is developed. MCIP will bring thousands of workers, customers, vendors, and trucks to southeast Salem, and without widening of Kuebler west of Interstate 5 and improvements to the Kuebler/I-5 interchange, current congestion will only worsen. Because good access to MCIP will be critical to luring businesses to the site, improvements should be made to facilitate the development of MCIP. In the long-term, Kuebler should be widened to Commercial Street to accommodate additional traffic in this growing part of the city.

Responsibility: City, State, Federal

Bring Commercial Air Service to Salem. While Salem is close enough to PDX to allow for relatively easy air travel, travel from Salem to other cities, including large cities in neighboring states such as Seattle, relies almost entirely on driving. This lack of good access to a vital form of transportation makes it difficult to carry out business transactions and hinders the area's recruitment of new firms. The City is working to attract Horizon Air to provide commercial air service to Salem, which would provide flights to hundreds of cities by way of Seattle.

Responsibility: City, State, Federal

Deepen the Columbia River Channel. The Columbia River is located outside the Mid-Valley, but the region's economic health is tied to this transportation route because of our need to export goods, particularly agricultural products. Marion County shippers receive a greater benefit from the Port of Portland's container shipping operations than any other county in the northwest other than Multnomah, with exporters saving \$9.6 million in shipping costs each year. Plans are underway to deepen the channel between the river's mouth and Portland from 40 to 43 feet to allow larger vessels with deeper drafts to continue serving ports along the river. With the loss of two of the ports steamship lines, leaving just one remaining, it is important that the region do all it can to preserve and improve service. Without access to these vessels, Oregon will suffer loss of exports to foreign markets, and it will become increasingly difficult for Oregon producers, especially farmers, to sell their products abroad.

Responsibility: State, Federal

Improve Rail Service in the Mid-Valley. Despite neglect of our nation's rail system, trains continue to move a large portion of America's freight, and manufacturers, wood product companies, and farmers and food processors remain particularly dependent on rail. Trains

carry 16% of freight tonnage in Oregon, and in the Mid-Willamette Valley, Portland & Western railroad provides shortline rail service to many manufacturers, including Boise Paper Solutions, Puentes Bros., Weyerhaeuser, and Morse Bros., which together shipped nearly 16,000 railcars—the equivalent of nearly 60,000 truckloads—in 2003. Portland & Western’s extension of service to Morse Bros.’s gravel pit near Brooks, which takes nearly 20,000 truckloads off I-5 annually and saves Morse Bros. a substantial amount of money, illustrates how rail service can often help businesses move their products more efficiently and cheaply than by truck. With industrial land served by rail proving both rare and in high demand, officials should look for ways to extend rail access to industrial sites. The Governor’s Connect Oregon proposal would invest money from lottery-backed bonds in upgrading both shortline railroads and the long-haul system. With many railshippers experiencing significant service problems with longhaul Class 1 railroads such as Union Pacific, Congress and the federal government should take steps to ensure that the business practices of the Class 1 railroads do not reduce the ability of many manufacturers to get their goods to market.

Responsibility: Local, State, Federal

Enhance the Salem Area’s Transit System. Salem’s public transit system helps relieve traffic congestion that costs businesses time and money and also connects workers to jobs. Nearly 1 in 10 Salem area households do not have a vehicle available for use, meaning a lack of transit would condemn many to unemployment and deprive employers of a large pool of potential labor. In recent years Salem-Keizer Transit has taken steps to better connect employers with workers. For example, Cherriots has extended a route to businesses that depend on workers who may not have access to a vehicle, including several hotels, TransOcean, Costco, and Kettle Chips. In 2002 Salem-Keizer Transit offered more than five million rides, a nearly 60% increase since 1996. With ridership increasing more than twice as fast as the rate of population growth, investments should be made in the transit system that will allow for continued expansion to reduce traffic congestion and better connect workers to employers.

Responsibility: Transit District, Federal

Extend County Timber Payments. For nearly a century, counties and school districts containing federal forest land have received a portion of timber revenues derived from those forests to compensate for lost economic development opportunities and property tax revenue. With logging in federal forests reduced in recent decades, payments to counties and schools dropped dramatically, causing hardship in many rural areas. Congress enacted the Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000 to stabilize payments to forest counties and schools. The legislation provides a guaranteed payment based on historical timber receipts that has been vital in helping counties and schools continue to provide important services. Oregon’s counties receive over \$250 million in annual safety net funding, with millions more going to our cash-strapped schools. Marion County, for example, received \$5.5 million last year to pay for roads and other projects, and Polk County received \$2.4 million. However, this important legislation expires next year. With this deadline approaching, legislators have launched an impressive bipartisan effort to extend the payments.

Responsibility: Federal